

EPA Region 9 Gold King Mine Spill Response Update 8/12/15

LATEST ACTIVITIES:

- Currently R9 has 23 staff/contractors on site, with that number likely increasing to closer to 30 later this week.
- R9 continues to have daily communications with Navajo Nation representatives to coordinate on water sampling, community outreach and other response efforts.
- R9 Administrator Blumenfeld is traveling to the area this week with the Administrator.
- R9 is conducting water sampling along the San Juan River in the Navajo Nation at 11 monitoring sites.
- R9 is working to set up a Region 9-lead public meeting with Navajo Nation citizens. Date:TBA
- Working with Region 6, a toll-free number has been established for citizens requesting sampling for their water well, or if they need water for livestock or agricultural irrigation. EPA will be doing the sampling. The number is 844-607-9700.
- EPA (R9) is paying for water hauling services to deliver water to areas impacted by the discharge. The wells for the NTUA - Montezuma Creek public water system were shut down as a precaution prior to the contaminant plume reaching the area. NTUA will be providing hauled water from the NTUA – Aneth public water system to the Montezuma Creek service area. The Montezuma Creek system is a groundwater system, but some of the wells are 100 feet from the river, so the wells were closed as a precaution.

ONGOING RESPONSE ACTIVITIES:

- Region 9 continues to be in close communication with the Navajo Nation and is coordinating with them on various efforts including sampling and community outreach.
- Additionally, Region 9 is holding daily calls with the Navajo Nation, sending Navajo National representatives daily updates via email, and Region 9 is working with the wider regional response to set up an 800 number for Navajo Nation and other citizens who are seeking to have their water tested.
- Region 9 has deployed an On Scene Coordinator (OSC) to the Durango Incident Command Post to coordinate Region 9 activities with an EPA Area Command in Region 8. The Region has also deployed a Public Information Officer (PIO) to participate in a Joint Information Center (JIC), presently in Durango, and with other the affected Federal, State, County and Tribal agencies. Region 9 deployed an OSC to the Farmington Incident Command Post (ICP) today to coordinate field activities and stakeholder requests for assistance. **The ICP is co-located with EPA Incident Commanders from Region 6 (Dallas, TX office).**
- Region 9 has hired a contractor to coordinate with Navajo Tribal Utilities Authority (NTUA) to deliver water to the areas impacted by the discharge. The Montezuma Creek well development area was closed as a precaution prior to any impact. EPA contractors are collecting NTUA provided water from the Sweetwater wellfield and delivering it to the Montezuma Creek service area.
- **The Navajo EPA surface water monitoring program (Shiprock Office) collected water and sediment samples from the San Juan River - prior to the spill impact and have since established 8 fixed monitoring stations to be sampled daily. The stations stretch along the San Juan between Shiprock, NM and Mexican Hat, UT. Region 9 has provided 6 START contractors to coordinate and conduct increased sample collection and lab analysis in conjunction with NNEPA.**
- **NNEPA also requested drinking water sampling support immediately for Navajo operated water intakes. A USEPA drinking water expert has deployed and is working with NNEPA to**

inventory and assess water sources including private wells and intakes. USEPA will establish and provide a 1-800 telephone for private citizens and entities to request well water sampling.

- Two Community Involvement Coordinators (CICs) arrived in Farmington Sunday. CICs met with Navajo Incident Command in Shiprock Sunday evening for an update on outreach activities to date. It was reported that by the end of 8/10, approximately 75% of Navajo communities along San Juan River had been reached by Navajo teams. Community Health Representatives from Navajo are working to finish outreach to remaining communities.

PREVIOUS REGION 9 RESPONSE ACTIVITIES:

- Navajo officials reacted days prior to any observed impact of the Gold King Mine release on the Navajo Nation, assessing their well fields and drinking and irrigation water intake systems and issuing a precautionary "do not use" public service announcement regarding water from potentially impacted sources. On 8/8, the President of the Navajo Nation declared a State of Emergency for the San Juan River valley. Region 9 held a coordination meeting with Navajo Nation EPA (NNEPA) and Navajo Department of Public Safety.
- On 8/10, contractors tried to pinpoint the leading edge of the waste water discharge plume near Hogback, NM. Though not clearly visible as before, contractors conducted conductivity monitoring and collected samples from the area in an attempt to identify downstream impacts. Also, coordination calls on 8/10 with Federal agencies, State of AZ, Coconino County and City of Page officials and Congressional representatives suggested the need for sampling even further downstream in the Glen Canyon, Lake Powell and Coconino County segments of the San Juan River. EPA has begun to coordinate efforts with those of the Bureau of Reclamation and US Geological Survey to share information.
- On 8/10, CICs attended two special chapter meetings arranged by Vice President Jonathan Nez and provided an update on EPA activity to date. At both chapter meetings, held at Aneth and Oljato, Vice President Nez participated, along with Attorney General Ethel Branch and local chapter officials. Present at the Oljato meeting were NNEPA Executive Director Dr. Donald Ben and special advisor to President Begaye Peterson Zah. The CICs will partner with various Navajo officials, Navajo incident command, and other responding agencies to ensure comprehensive outreach to all affected Navajo Chapters.

INCIDENT BACKGROUND:

On August 5, while investigating the Gold King Mine in Colorado, an EPA cleanup team triggered a large release of mine wastewater into Cement Creek. EPA is working closely with responders and local and state officials to monitor water contaminated by the release. The release's path flows through three of EPA's regions (Region 8 (Colorado/Utah & Southern Ute Tribe); Region 6 (New Mexico), and Region 9 (Navajo Nation). EPA has activated its Emergency Operations System to ensure coordination among its regions, laboratories and national program offices in Washington, D.C. EPA is closely coordinating with officials in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Southern Ute Tribe and Navajo Nation.